

BOOK REVIEW

Common Families of Flowering Plants by M. Hickey and C. King. 1997. xii + 212 pp. illus. ISBN 0-521-57281-9 \$64.95 (cloth), 0-521-57609-1 \$22.95 (paper). Cambridge University Press, New York, NY.

This book is a follow-up to the authors' popular 1981 *100 Families of Flowering Plants*. Scaled down to concentrate on 25 common families, it is designed to acquaint botany students with the general features of select angiosperm families and relationships among them.

The book is essentially divided into two sections. The first section represents an expansion from the previous title. It offers a 30 page component on essential basic botany and is intended to cater to amateur botanists and field biologists, or to serve as a refresher course to professional botanists. Included is a short account on the evolution of the Plant Kingdom and a diagram summarizing the classification and characteristic features of dicots and monocots, followed by a comprehensive treatment of flowering plant classification and morphology. The structures of vegetative, flowering, and fruiting portions of plants are fully diagramed by well-labeled, simple line drawings. Over 80 illustrations are dedicated to stem and foliar features, and over 100 to inflorescence, perianth, androecium, gynoecium, seed, seedling, and fruit characteristics. Key vocabulary words are highlighted in bold print throughout the text.

The second section of the book concentrates on detailed descriptions of 25 common angiosperm families, chosen for their economic, ornamental, and ecological importance. This part comprises the majority of the book and covers 19 dicot and 6 monocot families, taxonomically arranged. Each family treatment includes overall distribution, general features, economic and ornamental aspects, and intrafamilial classification. Every family account is followed by a detailed description of at least one (up to four) representative species. The species accounts include information on distribution, vegetative and floral characteristics (including floral formulas), and pollination, and offer alternate species for further study. Each species is fully illustrated by original line drawings of internal or external floral details and/or full habit.

A useful feature is a section composed of four comparative

tables. Each table contains three families which have superficially similar characters. The table compares features of flowers and fruits and, in some instances, leaves and inflorescence types. An example of compared families includes Ranunculaceae-Saxifragaceae-Rosaceae and Liliaceae-Amaryllidaceae-Iridaceae. A selected bibliography and comprehensive glossary also complement the treatments in the book.

The most pleasing attribute of the book is its prolific use of illustrations. Both detailed and diagrammatic illustrations are well prepared and usually dedicated to a full page. One feature that may be distressing to North American users is the authors' adoption of unfamiliar representative species. Most species in the book are common in the Old World, and merely introduced into parts of North America. *Common Families of Flowering Plants* offers fundamental knowledge of flowering plant form and terminology. It presents concise, useful taxonomic descriptions of many important plant families and would be a welcome addition to any botanist's references, as well as to those with a need to understand flower structure (illustrators, gardeners, etc.).

—DONALD J. PADGETT, Department of Biology, Southwest Missouri State University, Springfield, MO 65804.